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ABSTRACT

The Evaluation Office of the Region 20 Education Service Center, which serves 50 school districts in the San Antonio (Texas) area, is delineated in this report. The introduction describes the location, size, and budget of the agency as well as the structure and funding of the evaluation office. The first chapter notes the region's future needs for evaluation of microcomputer software and computer-related educational programs and of the cost effectiveness of other educational program options. Chapter 2 covers Region 20's allocation of resources, which involves using an hourly rate for figuring evaluation support. The evaluation office's interaction with its political environment is treated in chapter 3. The fourth chapter discusses the administrative and program evaluation strategies employed by Region 20 to promote the use of evaluation. The final chapter concerns the evaluation office's personnel requirements at the administrative and support levels and comments that computer literacy is increasingly required of personnel. (PGD)

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MANAGING A REGIONAL EDUCATION SERVICE AGENCY EVALUATION UNIT

By

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Presented as part of the symposium "Managing an Evaluation Unit" at the Annual Meeting of the American Education Research Association held in New York City, March 1982.

EA 015 101

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This paper is part of a symposium "Managing an Evaluation Unit" presented at the 1982 American Education Research Association. Presenters are Dr. Tom Saterfiel of the Bureau of Educational Research and Evaluation, Mississippi State University; Dr. Hugh Peck, Research and Development Office, Louisiana State Department of Education; Dr. Floraline Steven, Evaluation, Los Angeles schools; and Dr. Alan Roecks, Evaluation Services, Education Service Center-Region 20, San Antonio.

The first part of the paper provides an introduction to the author's setting. Questions answered are:

1. What is Education Service Center, Region 20?
2. How is the Region 20 Evaluation Office set up?
3. How is the Region 20 Evaluation Office funded?

The symposium discusses five common purposes faced by a manager of an evaluation unit. The purposes and related questions are as follows:

I. Finance

1. What kinds of evaluation services will districts want and be willing to fund in future years?

II. Allocation of Resources

1. What is Region 20's method of resource allocation?
2. What are the administrative advantages of allocating resources based on an hourly rate?
3. What are the disadvantages of an hourly rate?
4. How are unforeseen requests for evaluation support handled?

III. Politics

1. What is the role of the Evaluation Office in the political environment of the Service Center?
2. What is the role of Region 20 Evaluation in the politics of districts it serves?

IV. Use of Evaluative Information (Dissemination)

1. What *administrative strategies* does Region 20 employ to promote use of evaluations?
2. What *program evaluation strategies* does Region 20 employ to promote use of evaluations?

V. Personnel

1. What kind of personnel are needed to carry out evaluation work in an intermediate education service agency?
2. What are the special requirements for the head of an evaluation office in an intermediate agency?
3. What are the future requirements for evaluation personnel?

This report was illustrated by Marian Brady. Her patience and creativity are appreciated.

Introduction

What is Education Service Center, Region 20?

The State of Texas is divided into 20 regions served by intermediate education agencies. Established as part of the Public Education System of Texas in 1967, the service agencies offer school districts and teachers an opportunity to receive specialized services which normally would be beyond the reach of the average-sized school system. By participating in programs with intermediate agencies, school systems take advantage of the cost saving benefits and program financing and planning which result from cooperative efforts. They also realize additional funding and services that are available from state and federal services for regional programs of this type.

Region 20 - What is it???

One of these 20 Texas centers, Education Service Center-Region 20, or simply Region 20, located in San Antonio, provides services and programs to 50 school districts in a 14-county area of South Texas. In 1981, the Center provided over 50 program and services, many funded from state and federal competitive grants. The Center had a $9,000,000 budget and employed over 400 personnel.

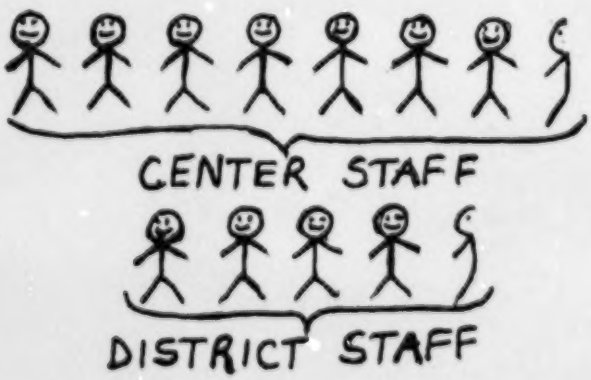
How is the Region 20 Evaluation Office set up?

In 1977, Region 20 set up an Evaluation Office. The initial function of the office was to evaluate all Center programs and services and to provide feedback on the effectiveness of these offerings. The office later added a second function, providing evaluation services to districts on a cost recovery basis. In 81-82, the office was made up of 12 full-time professional personnel,

several part-time professionals and a strong cadre of clerical staff, many of whom were part-time. The Evaluation Office has a coordinator and three work units. One work unit evaluates programs delivered to districts by Center staff, another provides evaluation services to districts and a third provides evaluation services to both the Center and districts. Within each work unit are a manager, an evaluator, evaluation assistant(s), and clerical support. Project evaluation is carried out as a team effort capitalizing on the various roles and abilities of available staff. Evaluation staff record time spent on each project.

How is the Region 20 Evaluation Office funded?

Funding for evaluation is from three sources. The largest source is federal and state competitive grants for Center programs provided to districts. Evaluation looks at the effectiveness of these teacher training programs. Since 1977, Region 20 has carried out 180 evaluations for Center projects totalling $15,000,000. A smaller amount of funding comes from special projects. These include technical assistance for schools having Title I migrant programs, a research study on the effectiveness of use of evaluative information and direct evaluation support for two district based Center programs. A third source is contract work with some of the larger school districts. How the office's 12 full-time evaluation staff are funded is depicted below.



Next year promises to be a year of cutbacks for Region 20. Most federal competitive grants will be lost due to changes in national policy. The Evaluation Office can lose up to six evaluators if additional funds are not identified. We are optimistic about the future. Districts, once familiar with our services, seem interested in receiving evaluation support. Efforts are underway to make our services more visible to districts in hopes of making up the projected deficit.

I. Finance

What kinds of evaluation services will districts want and be willing to fund in future years?

Districts will need support in how to use microcomputers. First, there is a need to evaluate the effectiveness of educational courseware for microcomputers. Some frequently asked questions include, "How consistent is the courseware with the existing curriculum? Do objectives of the courseware coincide with the objectives being taught? Are instructional strategies consistent: i.e., does the courseware use the same instructional approach employed by the classroom teacher?" Second, evaluation offices can assist implementing computer managed instructional systems that manage classroom data. Some systems, such as the nationally validated Comprehensive Achievement Monitoring out of Hopkins, Minnesota, help improve teacher-made tests. This is done by using item statistics stored by the microcomputer.

"Those were the good old days."

Future years will cause education to become more accountable. Data on the cost of educational services will be required. The role of evaluation may be one of management consultant. The evaluator may be asked which program options are most effective. Common questions include "How can a department best be reorganized? Should we contract for school bus service or purchase our own buses?"

II. Allocation of Resources

What is Region 20's method of resource allocation?

Allocation of resources is made easier by having an hourly rate for evaluation support. This method is required by law as we provide support on a contractual basis to 50 separate projects. Projects are billed as they receive services. The rate is set at the beginning of each year and is calculated by dividing estimated revenue by available staff time. (See Roecks & Flores, 1980). Managers of the three evaluation units use the hourly rate to determine the amount of time to be put in for each project. A table giving the amount of time available for each position is used to determine how much staff time can be put in. (See Appendix A). Time available is then matched to the amount of work to be put in for each management unit.

What are the advantages of allocating resources based on an hourly rate?

First, each project receives evaluation support according to its level of funding. Second, information is available on when the evaluation work was completed, who did the evaluation and the kind of evaluation activity performed. Third, projects can benefit from evaluation work done on other similar projects. Efficiency is accomplished by grouping like evaluation tasks. For example, this year we have three programs in the area of English composition. We have grouped the projects and assigned them to one evaluator. Common tasks are identified and additional evaluation time is made available for the three projects as a whole. Also, there is a senendipitous outcome for project staff as a result of evaluation grouping: project staff are forced to communicate among themselves, with the evaluator serving as facilitator. A fourth benefit is that the system allows better use of staff skills. Any evaluation staff is "eligible" to work on any project. Hence it is possible to provide a wider array of evaluation support for projects.

What are some of the disadvantages of an hourly rate?

A major difficulty is staff have to keep their hours weekly. The amount of paperwork is then increased. Valuable staff time is lost. Hours are recorded and coded into a microcomputer. At least 20 hours per week of clerical support is required to maintain the system. Carrying out as many as 50 separate evaluations can be an administrative nightmare. As noted earlier, three managerial units share this responsibility. Each must organize resources to carry out work assigned. Each professional staff member has four to twelve evaluations. Budgeting the right amount of time for evaluation tasks can be difficult. Unforeseen circumstances can mean difficulty in carrying out promised evaluations. The system allows very little latitude; evaluations need to be done on time. Professional staff can charge no more than 40 hrs./week of time. Often extra time must be put in outside the regular work week. A final problem is explaining the hourly rate, especially to district clients. We find it best to list the kinds of evaluation products to be received.

"Which evaluation should I work on next?"

How are unforeseen requests for evaluation support handled?

Politically, these requests cannot be denied. They have to be carried out, usually under tight deadlines. Several strategies have been successfully employed. They involve setting aside resources for ad hoc services during initial planning. One strategy is to dedicate a portion of a person's time to such requests. Another strategy, used for the last two years, sets aside up to 10% in each evaluation plan for ad hoc services. Ad hoc services are

carried out by the evaluator assigned to project person making the request. Carrying out unexpected requests is made easier by having part-time professional personnel available. Part-time support usually can carry out much of the requested work--allowing the office to be minimally disrupted by unanticipated requests.

III. The Political Environment

What is the role of the Evaluation Office in the political environment of the Center?

Placement of the Evaluation Office within the organization is important. Our office is relatively independent of the programs it evaluates. (Anderson & Ball, 1978). Organizationally, the coordinator is responsible to the Executive Director; fiscally, the office manages its own monies. This arrangement has allowed the office to be seen as somewhat objective. Maintaining this independence has been difficult. (Roecks, et al, 1979). When faced with controversial data, some project staff have tried to bring the bearers of bad news--the evaluator--under their control. Others have attempted to control the level of evaluation funding. Support from the top was necessary to withstand these challenges.

Most of any political success our office has had has been facilitated by Center's Executive Director. During our first three years (1977-80), we experienced many challenges to our funding. (See my 1980 Evaluation Network paper "Resistance to Evaluation" (Roecks, 1980)). The Executive Director was able to educate the funding agencies on how evaluation was used to monitor program activities and to improve the overall program thrust. He was also able to gain support from various audiences for evaluative information. This allowed the evaluations to have a hearing in the political arena. Meetings were set up where evaluation findings

were reviewed by those affected. Included were program clients, funding agency personnel, board members of the funding and recipient agencies and administration from districts served. Credibility was enhanced by having program rather than evaluation personnel explain findings.

What is the role of Region 20 Evaluation in the politics of districts it serves?

The Service Center must function in an advisory capacity to schools. It cannot be effective if it tells administrators how to run their districts. The Evaluation Office, as part of the Center, must exercise caution in reporting evaluation findings. Unless permission is given, evaluation findings are not shared with other districts. When negative findings result, they are reported in conjunction with recommendations. If at all possible, recommendations are made jointly by evaluation and program personnel. This practice tends to "lessen the blow" of the sometimes unexpected, negative results.

What kinds of evaluations do we carry out? The focus of our evaluations is on specific federal programs. We seldom look at the overall focus of the district. This limits the impact of evaluations. We have carried out more general evaluations for a few districts. Here our primary audiences were the superintendent and school board. In one district where we have the interest and support of the superintendent and board, the evaluations have been used for program improvement.

IV. Use of Evaluative Information (Dissemination)

What <u>administrative strategies</u> does Region 20 employ to promote use of evaluations?

- Hire people with good communication skills. The statistical expert who program staff could not understand does not fit well in our office.

- Budget time for using evaluation data. We try to set aside about 10%.
- Planning for better use is an ongoing activity. Last year we were able to get a planning document funded. The small scale NIE grant looks at the amount of time spent by evaluators in using evaluation data and the overall level of use
- Documentation of use of evaluative data is required in each annual final report. (See Roecks & Casper, 1980).

What program evaluation strategies does Region 20 employ to promote use of evaluations?

- Involve decision makers early. Get them to commit to a written evaluation plan.
- Focus on areas that are priority to the decision maker.
- Decision makers prefer qualitative data. Interview information is more credible than tables of numbers.
- Report findings informally. Written communication is usually less effective.
- If results are negative, talk results over with project staff. Report negative results in conjunction with recommendations developed cooperatively by project and evaluation personnel.

V. Personnel

What kind of personnel are needed to carry out evaluation work in an intermediate education service agency?

In comparison to other educational operations, more secretarial and clerical support is required in the research and evaluation area. For our office, two to four hours of support are allocated for each professional position. A part-time person whose primary task is transcribing interview information and a full-time component secretary are also employed.

Keeping secretarial help used to be a problem. Turnover for full-time personnel was high. Staff went to other departments where the work load was less demanding. The problem has been solved by employing a strong cadre of part-time secretaries. Peaks in work loads can be adjusted with available personnel. This solution has resulted in higher quality secretarial support.

At the professional staff level, we need people who have good qualitative skills, who can write and are good communicators. Entry level is usually a Master's degree. People trained in school psychology or guidance and counseling with graduate record examination scores above 1000 have worked out well. Background in special education, curriculum design or bilingual education is desirable. Several staff have expertise in statistics and computers.

What are the requirements for the head of an evaluation office in an intermediate agency?

Background and experience in administration are requisites. Being familiar with budgets is especially important. Estimating the cost of products to be delivered to districts proves to be a continuing challenge. The process of negotiating contracts can be difficult.

The administrator must be prepared to dedicate a larger than normal amount of time to reinforce staff for good work. The profession of program evaluation does not provide a great deal of positive reinforcement for its members. Evaluators generally deal with problems and ways to improve the present state of affairs. As a result, turnover can be high and evaluators become "burned out". The head of a R&E office must keep this in kind; he or she needs to provide a reward system within the office environment.

What are future requirements for personnel in an intermediate education agency?

The office is moving towards literacy in microcomputers. Support staff are learning how to use word processing. Professional staff are given the opportunity to become involved with microcomputers. Whenever possible, evaluation work is identified so that the microcomputer can be used. Program staff then gain an understanding about the microcomputer while working with their evaluator.

Pet ?

Dolphin?

"Gee, is this a.....?"

Apple ?

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Appendix A

Time Accountability for 12 Month Full-Time Evaluation Employees

Evaluation Position	Allocation of Available Time[a]								
	Leave				Evaluation Time				
	Holidays[b]	Vacation[c]	Sick[d]	InSvc[e]	Avail Days	Avail Hours	Hours Monthly	% f Chargeable	Total Charg
Coordinator	18	12	9	10.0	212.0	1696	141.3	60%[g]	84.8
Manager	18	12	9	8.5	213.5	1708	142.3	60%	85.4
Evaluator (SP)	18	12	9	7.5	214.5	1716	143.0	40%[h]	57.2
Evaluator	18	12	9	7.5	214.5	1716	143.0	80%	114.4
Evaluation Asst II	18	12	9	7.0	215.0	1720	143.3	85%	121.8
Evaluation Asst I	18	12	9	6.5	215.5	1724	143.7	85%	122.1

[a] The number of days in year (365) less weekend days (104) equals 261.

[b] The number of ESC-20 holidays during the school year.

[c] The number of authorized vacation days.

[d] The average number of sick days based upon 1977-78 attendance.

[e] Based upon ESC-20 policy and procedures for training activities.

[f] Percentage is based on previous years' time and effort records.

[g] 50% of Coordinators' time is prorated for administration. The remaining 10% represents time that may be charged to a project when carrying out specific evaluation activity.

[h] Special Projects Evaluator works on numerous non-chargeable activities for an estimated total of about 40% chargeable.

Step 3 Divide the estimated revenues by the estimated annual chargeable hours to obtain the hourly rate.

$$\text{Hourly} = \frac{\text{Revenue Available}}{\text{Hours chargeable + contracted hours}}$$

Example

$$\text{Hourly Rate} = \frac{\$242,500}{13,698.3}$$

Hourly Rate = $17.70

		Hours
	Contracted Hours	0
1	Coordinator	1017.6
3	Managers	3074.4
1	Evaluator (SP)	686.4
2.5	Eval Asst II (11 mo.)	2679.6
1	Eval Asst I	1465.2
1	Eval Asst I (11 mo.)	1343.1
		13,698.3

TASK CODE

1 NEEDS ASSESSMENT

* . Consultation with Center personnel desiring data.
. File search for previously obtained data.
. Preparation of data collecting instruments.
. Selecting sample, collecting data.
. Tabulating, processing & analyzing results.
. Report preparation.
* . Consultations to interpret & explain findings.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If related to funded project

NON-CHARGEABLE: If a new proposal.

2 PROPOSAL DEVELOPMENT

* . Conferences, meetings, & discussions.
. Reviewing objectives.
. Preparing the evaluation section.
. Reading or reviewing proposals for comment.
. Writing complete proposal.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If a continuation proposal.

NON-CHARGEABLE: If a new proposal.

3 EVALUATION PLANNING

. Consultation within evaluation staff.
. Preparing the Evaluation Plan.

CHARGEABLE: If related to funded project.

4 DATA COLLECTION AND PROCESSING

. Developing or selecting instruments.
. Travel time connected with collecting data.
* . Conducting interviews; telephone or in-person.
. Observations; workshops, schools, centers, etc.
. Administering exams, tests, questionnaires, etc.
. Distributing & collecting questionnaires.
. Briefings pertaining to data collection.
. Developing a record keeping system.
. Processing workshop evaluation forms.
. Tabulating or scoring other instrument data.
. Preparation for card punching & computer run.
. Statistical analysis of data.
. Reviewing records, reports, or other information.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If related to funded project.

TASK CODE

5 REPORTING EVALUATION

. Writing findings, memoranda, interim, or final reports.
* . Disseminating evaluation results.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If related to funded project.

6 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE (LEA)

. Travel time connected with providing assistance.
. Conducting or participating in workshops.
. Other assistance provided.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If related to a funded project.

7 INTERACTION WITH PROJECT STAFF

. Meetings involving learning about program.
. Contact about developing evaluation plan.
. Briefings, conferences, & sign-off of plans.
. Verbally conveying findings or results of evaluation.
. Providing technical consultation.
. Formulating recommendations.
. Consultations involving using evaluation data.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If related to a funded project.

8 INTERNAL PROCEDURES

. All inservice sessions & retreat.
. Center, component, & unit meetings.
. Area conferences & workshops.
. Special studies & projects.
. Preparation of professional papers.
. Screening applicants for employment.
. Attendance at professional meetings.
. Administrative & Supervising.

CHARGEABLE: If related to a funded project. Prorated for personnel with split fundings.

11 ALL ABSENCES

. Vacation
. Sick
. Personal
. Jury/military

. Other

CHARGEABLE: Prorated for personnel with split funding.

*Exclusive of direct interaction with Project Staff.